

Parabellum (Prepare for War):
“The Story Behind the Art”

The 82 canvases on display here were created at the turn of the century, by an aging Civil War Veteran named Bains Revere. They were discovered moldering in an abandoned Sangerville, Maine home slated for demolition and rescued before they would be destroyed along with the home. Careful research since their recovery has revealed that Bains Revere was a childhood friend to Hiram Maxim, inventor of the automatic machine gun. Both Revere and Maxim were born in Sangerville, Maine in 1840. Revere died there in 1902, Maxim died in London in 1916.

Revere kept up a correspondence with Maxim throughout his life, during which time Maxim had a career as an inventor working with electricity and also as a weapons developer. Maxim was reported to have said:

"In 1882 I was in Vienna, where I met an American whom I had known in the States. He said, 'Hang your chemistry and electricity! If you want to make a pile of money, invent something that will enable these Europeans to cut each others' throats with greater facility."

Revere had always held his friend Maxim in high esteem for his brilliantly inventive mind and immense accomplishments. In learning of Maxim's shift to weapons development Revere became contemplative and agitated and it was around this time that he is believed to have begun crafting his "Parabellum" canvases. Though Bains Revere had served as a soldier in the Civil War, he had been a straggler, fearfully shirking duty and shunned as a coward and a traitor, during and after the war. That this response to the violence of war might be considered normal and healthy today is better understood and it is believed that the creation of these canvases might have helped to mitigate what we now fully understand as clinical post-traumatic stress disorder. Ulysses S. Grant in his autobiography reserved a degree of tolerance for stragglers:

"On one occasion during the day I rode back as far as the river and met General Buell, ... at that time there probably were as many as four or five thousand stragglers lying under cover of the river bluff, panic-stricken, most of whom would have been shot where they lay, without resistance, before they would have taken muskets and marched to the front to protect themselves. ...I saw him berating them and trying to shame them into joining their regiments. He even threatened them with shells from the gunboats near by. But it was all to no effect. Most of these men afterward proved themselves as gallant as any of those who saved the battle from which they had deserted."

Revere's friend Maxim, meanwhile, had been able to avoid serving:

"Maxim had gotten a job in Dexter, Maine, where the younger men at Dexter had formed a home guard company with the local shoemaker as captain. They used

broomsticks for their drilling in lieu of rifles. Maxim soon tired of what he called 'playing soldier.'.... He sought the advice of an old friend, Dr. Springall, who advised that he was entirely too promising a young man to go off to war... A short time after this Maxim left Dexter and went to Huntingdon, Canada. This fact caused people to believe the story circulated by rival concerns at a later date that he deliberately dodged the Civil War draft in the United States by taking up residence in Canada. After some time Maxim's two brothers, Leander and Henry, were in the Army and since it was a policy of the draft board never to take more than two members from one family, he was never called."

The word parabellum was the motto for the German company, DWM, who introduced the Pistol Parabellum ('Luger Pistol') in the late 1890s, and licensed and manufactured versions of the Maxim machine gun, later modifying it into the Parabellum MG14, a 7.9 mm caliber World War I machine gun. Maxim founded an armaments company to produce his gun, which later merged with Nordenfeldt and the Vickers Corporation in 1896, becoming 'Vickers, Son & Maxim'. Their updated design, the Vickers gun, after Maxim's resignation from the board in 1911 on his 71st birthday, was the standard British machine gun for many years. It played an important role in the swift European colonization of Africa in the late 19th century.

Parabellum translates from the Latin: "Si vis pacem, para bellum" as: "If you wish for peace, prepare for war". It is an adage adapted from a statement found in Book 3 of Latin author Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus's tract *De Re Militari* (4th- or 5th-century) usually interpreted as meaning peace through strength, or that a strong society is less likely to be attacked by enemies if it is always well armed. It seems as though Revere is questioning this "philosophy" with his work of art.

To try and understand the poetry and art of Bains Revere we turn to the contemporary poet Chris Crittenden. In reflecting upon Revere's poetry and imagery Chris observed:

"Revere has, through his anguish around war, been drawn into the underbelly of the mind, where the archetypal fortunetellers wait, clothed in red dream-garb. The strange symbols and expressions don't care about conformity and in fact, are what has been imprisoned and silenced by conformity."

Kenny Cole, January 2014